

How MIA Works

1.) Working definition of antigypsyism

With the founding of the Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus (Antigypsyism Reporting and Information Center), known as MIA, a definition of antigypsyism was developed to fit the German context. It is based on the non-legally binding working definition of antigypsyism adopted by the members of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) on October 8, 2020, to which the federal government also refers. MIA's definition is also influenced by both the "Basic Paper on Antigypsyism" published in 2016 by the Alliance Against Antigypsyism and the 2021 report of the Independent Commission on Antigypsyism entitled "Change of Perspective. Catching Up on Justice. Participation."

The following working definition of antigypsyism has therefore served as the basis for MIA's work since the beginning of the project:

Antigypsyism describes the traditional societal perception and treatment of people who were and are viewed, stigmatized and persecuted as "gypsies." It is directed against Sinti and Roma, Yenish people and itinerants, for whom antigypsyism is often a formative experience. As the largest minority group in Europe, Sinti and Roma are also the people that have been most affected numerically by antigypsyism.

Antigypsyism has historical roots in society. It developed over many centuries, taking on a variety of forms, and today is predominantly a racist phenomenon. Antigypsyistic stereotypes are based on a social construct and make certain characteristics appear to be intrinsic and natural group attributes. A special hallmark of antigypsyistic narratives is to attribute specific characteristics in a blanket, immutable way. The reasons for the emergence of such generalizing attributions lie in the dominant culture / majority society.

Antigypsyism reveals itself in individual remarks and behavior as well as in institutional policies and practices. In discourse, antigypsyistic prejudices are passed along, made available and reinforced. Antigypsyism then finds expression in discriminatory attitudes, actions and structures, in violent acts or hate crimes (crimes motivated by antigypsyism) as well as in stigmatizing behavior. Since it also makes implicit or hidden appearances, it is not only important what is said and done but what is *not* said and done or omitted. The results of such open or hidden, symbolic or actual exclusionary practices as well as institutionalized inequality experienced in everyday life are to prevent those affected from experiencing social security and to deny them an equal access to rights, opportunities and participation in social and economic life.

Antigypsyism serves to stabilize, establish and reproduce relationships of power and dominance. In order to defend its own privileges, the majority society or dominant culture uses antigypsyism to justify hierarchies and the exclusion of certain groups from accessing material and symbolic resources. In addition, antigypsyism creates an outlet for individual and collective aggression (the scapegoat mechanism). In order to fight it, antigypsyistic stereotypes must be actively questioned and deconstructed.

2.) Basic features of antigypsyistic manifestations

Manifestations describe the various forms in which antigypsyism occurs. They refer to different contexts (historical events, social regulations, etc.) and differ in terms of the intended or unconscious, unintentional functions that the antigypsyistic attitudes, remarks or actions fulfill.

Although antigypsyism is deeply rooted in social norms and institutional practices, it constantly adapts itself to social, political and economic circumstances and therefore shows itself in new forms. Today the manifestations of antigypsyism are largely determined by racist ideas. Psychosocial characteristics such as deviant behavior were constructed hundreds of years ago for religious, cultural or social reasons and codified as projections. In the 20th century, a racialization took place that culminated in the genocide of the Sinti and Roma. After the Nazi era, these racist ideas continued to be carried forward, despite semantic shifts to constructs such as “ethnicity,” “origin” or “culture.”

In order to be able to document current antigypsyistic incidents, we focus on four manifestations, which express themselves in public life, in the media and politics, in the context of work, housing and health as well as in government institutions (educational institutions, administrative offices, the police and the justice system, etc.). The manifestations or the antigypsyistic stereotypes can be connected to other power dynamics, such as sexism, anti-Muslim racism, class discrimination or antisemitism.

Manifestations:

Nazi-related antigypsyism refers to antigypsyistic-motivated crimes, policies and practices during the Nazi era. This form serves to relativize or positively evaluate the racist persecution and extermination policies and practices of the time. It expresses itself, e.g., in the denial, distorted representation, trivialization or glorification of the genocide perpetrated on the Sinti and Roma or the persecution of alleged or actual members of the minority group.

Civil antigypsyism refers to the prevailing values and norms of today’s dominant culture / majority society, i.e., the normative order of the civil society and its legitimization. This manifestation indicates how the virtuous citizen is not allowed to behave and stigmatizes supposedly deviant behavior. Civil antigypsyism can be divided into the following subcategories:

- **Social antigypsyism** refers to deviations from normatively expected social behavior and expresses itself, e.g., in stereotyping people as being prone to crime or laziness. Women are also accused of being promiscuous or bad mothers.

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- **Cultural antigypsyism** refers to stereotypes about gypsies' supposed low level of civilization and reflects stereotypical ideas about identity and rootlessness.
- **Romanticizing antigypsyism** expresses itself in the idealization and glorification of a way of life that is perceived as different, which serves as a mirror / projection surface for the majority society's longings.
- **Religious antigypsyism** includes prejudices that arose centuries ago in a religious context, such as the accusation of practicing pagan, magical or satanic rites (fortune-telling, healing or cursing practices, etc.).

Antigypsyistic othering is based on the construction of an outside group as opposed to a "we group," providing a projection surface for stigmatizing attributions. Othering serves to enhance one's own value through delimitation/distinction from an imaginary object, which embodies characteristics or types of behavior that are undesired and that deviate from the norm (but are not specifically named). This form is therefore the basis for further attributions. Here othering will be used as a category for incidents that do not allow any further conclusions to be drawn about specific attributions, as, for example, with antigypsyistic chants or shouts in a soccer stadium.

Migration-related antigypsyism is associated with the antigypsyistic stereotype of the "foreign, parasitic invader." This form aims to prevent and delegitimize unwanted (EU) migration, which is defamed as "poverty-related immigration." It has parallels to social antigypsyism and connections to class-related prejudice and anti-Muslim racism (e.g., when talking about clan structures and criminality).

3.) Working definition for the denial and trivialization of the genocide committed against the Sinti and Roma

More than any other events, the racist persecution policies and practices during the Nazi era, with their aim at extermination, have had persistent negative effects on the persecuted and their descendants. In order to ensure that these racist crimes and their continuing effects receive appropriate attention, MIA uses a separate definition for the denial and trivialization of the Nazi genocide against the Sinti and Roma. This is based on the working definition for the denial and trivialization of the Holocaust adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in October 2013:

Discourses and forms of propaganda that negate, excuse or minimize the historical reality and the extent of the persecution and extermination of the Sinti and Roma and other people persecuted by the Nazis and their accomplices as gypsies during the Second World War will be viewed as denial and trivialization of the genocide committed against the Sinti and Roma, as will any attempts to obscure the responsibility for such acts. Denial refers to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust against them did not take place.

Denial or trivialization of these Nazi crimes also exists if the instruments of the persecution and extermination (such as gas chambers, shootings, starvation, forced labor, imprisonment, racist assessments, forced sterilizations and medical experiments on humans, etc.) or the premeditation involved in these crimes are denied, doubted or minimized.

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In all their different forms, the denial and trivialization of the genocide committed against the Sinti and Roma are always an expression of antigypsyism. Forms of genocide denial also include the claim that the Sinti and Roma exaggerated or invented the genocide, in order to gain a political or financial benefit. Forms of trivialization include the claim that Sinti and Roma are responsible for their own genocide and other crimes committed against them. In the final analysis, the aim of these forms of denial and trivialization is to declare Sinti and Roma guilty and antigypsyism legitimate.

Statements that present the genocide against the Sinti and Roma as a positive historical event are also included in the category of trivialization. Such statements do not involve a denial of the genocide but, as a radical form of antigypsyism, are closely linked to it. They imply that the genocide did not go far enough in reaching its goal of extermination (the Auschwitz decree).

4.) Incident category

MIA documents incidents that occur as a result of antigypsyistic prejudices.

A series of indicators based on the guidelines for monitoring hate crimes by the “Facing Facts!” initiative has been developed in order to better demonstrate what antigypsyism is. These indicators signal when an incident could have been inspired by antigypsyism. The following indicators suggest a possible antigypsyistic background: the victim’s perception; the witnesses’ perception; the perpetrator’s background; the location of the incident; the time of the incident; words or symbols; a history of previous incidents; the degree of violence.

When differentiating between types of incidents, MIA follows the categorizations of other monitoring structures. The categories capture the basic character of the incident and serve to classify the incidents centrally. The differentiation of the incident categories is not related to any criminal offenses that may be connected to the incident.

Note on categorization: Cases often fit into several incident types. The hierarchy between codes on the same level is as follows: Codes that are listed first have precedence over those below them. For example, if someone is insulted and beaten during an incident, then the incident should be tagged with the category “attack” instead of “verbal stereotyping – verbal attack.”

Categories:

Under **extreme violence**, we include physical attacks or attacks that can result in loss of life or severe physical injuries. These include arson attacks on inhabited buildings, bombs, shootings, kidnappings or knife attacks.

Under **attack**, we document physical attacks that do not endanger the life of the victim or result in serious physical harm. This also includes the mere attempt at a physical attack, e.g., when the person being attacked is able to defend himself/herself or flee in time, or the attack misses its target.

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Under the category of **discrimination**, we document disadvantages that are motivated by antigypsyism. These include, on the one hand, discrimination resulting from institutional actions in the context of fulfilling public tasks, based on unwritten rules and routines (e.g., racial profiling by the police or exclusionary practices in the educational sector). In addition, we use this category to document forms of individual discrimination resulting from individual actions, even when it takes place within an organization or company (e.g., when services, such as being served in a restaurant, are denied).

As **property damage**, we document attacks on, damage to or defacement of sites memorializing the genocide perpetrated on the Sinti and Roma as well as antigypsyistic-motivated damage to personal property. This category includes arson attacks on property that do not, however, endanger anyone's life, or the spraying or painting of antigypsyistic slogans or symbols on either memorial sites or the personal property of a victim.

Threats are verbal attacks clearly directed at a person or institution. They involve either a threat of violence against people, groups or things or an indirect or nonverbal threat of violence against specific people.

The category **verbal stereotyping** includes antigypsyistic statements that are not explicitly threatening (not directed at anyone in particular) and are not directly associated with discriminatory practices. This includes *verbal attacks* in the form of antigypsyistic insults or when people are specifically addressed in antigypsyistic ways. In addition, *antigypsyistic propaganda* (e.g., speeches or posters at meetings as well as graffiti or stickers both in the public space and in private property of non-Roma) is recorded here, along with *mass mailings* (antigypsyistic texts/emails sent to multiple addressees) and *other verbal stereotyping* such as romanticizing attributions.

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